

# VEDANTA and the West

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CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

*The Story Continues*

E. RAPHAEL MAROZZI

*What Vedanta Means to Me*

BLANCH PARTINGTON

*Shanti Ashrama*



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# VEDANTA

## and the West

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## THE STORY CONTINUES

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

The twenty-first chapter of a forthcoming book on Ramakrishna

THAT same evening, in accordance with Hindu custom, Sarada Devi sat down and began to remove her ornaments in token of her widowhood. Just as she was about to take off her gold bracelets, Ramakrishna appeared to her, looking as he had looked before his sickness came upon him. Taking her by the wrists, he asked, "why are you putting away the ornaments of a married woman? Do you really believe I'm dead?" Because of this vision, Sarada continued to wear her bracelets. Some days later Balaram Bose bought a piece of white cloth without a colored border, such as a widow should traditionally wear, and asked Golap Ma, one of Sarada's woman friends and a great devotee, to give it to her. Golap Ma found this commission painful and embarrassing; it was, in effect, a blunt reminder to Sarada of her loss. But when Golap Ma went to visit her, she saw that Sarada had already torn away a strip from the broad red border of her own wearing-cloth, making it very thin. Throughout the rest of her life, Sarada wore cloths with thin red borders, never plain white ones.

About a week after Ramakrishna's death, Naren and a young householder disciple named Harish were standing near the pond in the garden of the Cossipore house. It was eight

o'clock in the evening. Suddenly, Naren saw a draped and shining form approaching them along the path from the gate. He asked himself if this could be the Master, but said nothing to Harish, fearing that he was the victim of an hallucination. But, a moment later, Harish himself exclaimed in a hoarse whisper, "what's that?" So Naren shouted, "who's there?" Hearing the shout, some other disciples ran out of the house. But the luminous form vanished near a jasmine bush, within ten yards of where they stood.

Such were the spiritual reassurances. But the material outlook was far from reassuring. The lease on the Cossipore house was due to expire at the end of August. Ram Chandra Datta and most of the older devotees saw no reason why it should be renewed. It was quite unnecessary, they said, to go to the expense of providing a house for the young disciples. Why need they live together? Why shouldn't they return to their own homes and lead good pious Hindu lives, fulfilling their family duties?

One should not blame this group of householders for their attitude. They had no way of knowing that Ramakrishna had intended to found an order of monks; his instructions to the young disciples and his distribution of the monastic ochre cloths had been kept strictly private. Besides, the very idea of a monastic organization was foreign to Bengalis of that period; monks were thought of as individuals who wandered alone from place to place, never co-operating with each other.

Ram Chandra and his group held a meeting on August 19th and made plans for the immediate future. Since the Cossipore house was to be given up, there was nowhere for Sarada Devi to live. It was decided that she should go on a pilgrimage, which might ease her grief. Meanwhile, Ramakrishna's ashes were to be deposited in a garden-house at Kankurgachi, a village on the eastern outskirts of Calcutta. This

house had been bought by Ram Chandra, at Ramakrishna's suggestion, as a retreat for devotees who wished to meditate and perform kirtan; and it had been hallowed by visits from Ramakrishna himself. As for Ramakrishna's teaching, this was to be propagated in the conventional manner, by means of public lectures, books, and articles in magazines.

These plans were acceptable to the great majority of the devotees. They were not at all acceptable to Naren and the other disciples; nor to the very small minority of householders who stood by them, including M., Girish Ghosh, Balaram Bose and Surendra Nath Mitra. These still wished to see the Master's ashes enshrined on the bank of the Ganges—a project which had been at first favored by the majority and then given up because it would necessitate buying a plot of land. When it became certain that the ashes would be taken to Kankurgachi, Shashi and Niranjan determined on a trick. They secretly transferred most of the ashes to another vessel, leaving only enough in the original urn to allay suspicion. When the ceremony was held at Kankurgachi on August 23rd, the boys took part in it with apparent good will; Shashi himself carried the urn on his head. But meanwhile the rest of the ashes had been hidden in Balaram Bose's house. These ashes have now found their proper home beside the Ganges, within the shrine of the temple of Belur Math. A temple has also been built at Kankurgachi, to enshrine the copper urn.

Sarada Devi was unhappy when she heard of the dispute about the ashes; it seemed so trivial to her in the presence of death. She left for her pilgrimage to Vrindavan at the end of August, with Jogindra, Kali, Latu, Tarak, Golap Ma and some other women devotees. Rakhal went to live in Balaram's house. The rest of the boys had to return home temporarily, much against their will.

One evening early in September, while Surendra Nath

Mitra was meditating in his household shrine, Ramakrishna appeared to him and said, "what are you doing here? My boys are roaming about, without a place to live in—attend to that, before anything else." So Surendra hurried to Naren and promised to give as much money every month as he had given for the Cossipore house, provided that Naren could find a house where the Master's ashes and other relics could be worshiped regularly and where the monastic disciples could live, with the householder devotees visiting them from time to time.

After much hunting, Naren discovered a sufficiently cheap house near the Ganges at Baranagore. By the end of September, they had started using it. Gopal Sur was probably the first permanent inmate. The rest of the disciples came there during the daytime, and began to live there as soon as they were able to free themselves from family obligations.

The house had been deserted for some while before their arrival, because it was supposed to be haunted. It was said that many murders had been committed there. Cobras lived underneath it, and jackals were to be met with in the wilderness of the garden. The house itself was near to collapse. But the disciples were scarcely conscious of these disadvantages. For now they had their monastery and could live as their Master had taught them.

The boys slept on straw mats on the ground. Early in the morning, before daylight, Naren would get up and wake the others, singing, "awake, arise, all who would drink of the Divine Nectar!" Ramakrishna's bed was placed in the center of their shrineroom with his picture upon it. At the foot of the bed, on a low stool, stood an urn containing the ashes they had hidden at Balaram's, together with a pair of the Master's slippers. Here Shashi performed the daily worship.

The boys had no regular supply of money; sometimes they were near starvation. Often they ate nothing but boiled salt

rice and bitter herbs. They had only one presentable set of clothes in common, to be worn by anyone who had to go into the city. They called themselves "the *danas*"—the ghost-companions of Shiva—in token of their indifference to worldly ties and pleasures.

In the evenings, they would gather on the roof, where they argued eagerly for hours, about Ramakrishna, Shankara, Jesus of Nazareth, Hindu and European philosophy. Naren taught the others to sing and play musical instruments. The music would continue far into the night; and the neighbors complained without avail.

In December, Baburam was invited by his mother to come back for a short visit to his home in the village of Antpur, and to bring Naren with him. But, by the time they were to start, the party had grown to include Sarat, Shashi, Tarak, Kali, Niranjan, Gangadhar and Sarada Prasanna. They traveled down to Antpur by train, singing religious songs all the way. It will be remembered that Baburam's mother was herself a devotee of Ramakrishna; so she was delighted to have her son and his monastic brothers turn the visit into a retreat and devote many hours of every day to meditation.

One night, a fire of logs had been lighted in the compound. The disciples gathered around it and meditated for a long while. Then Naren began to tell them the story of Jesus, with emphasis on his great renunciation. He quoted the text from the Gospel according to St. Matthew: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." He spoke of the journeys of Christ's apostles. Then he called upon his brothers to become apostles likewise and to pledge themselves to renounce the world. This they all did, standing up in a body; taking the fire and the stars for their witnesses. Later, they discovered that this evening had been the Christian Christmas Eve, and

they felt that a more propitious time for their vow could not have been chosen.

It was after their return to Baranagore that the disciples assumed their monastic names, while performing the appropriate fire ceremony. Thenceforward they wore the ochre cloth of the monk. Kali (Abhedananda) has left an autobiography in which he states that the ceremony took place in the third week of January 1887. This date is probably correct, although there is a letter from Tarak (Shivananda) which seems to imply that it is much too early. It must also be remarked that M's account in the *Gospel* of his various visits to the monastery (during the first five months of 1887) always refers to the disciples by their original names. This may be due, however, to M's long-standing familiarity with them.

The first of M's visits was on February 21st. As soon as M. arrived, Tarak and Rakhal began to sing a song in praise of Shiva which Naren had just composed:

See where Shiva dances—strikes both cheeks  
and they resound—*ba-ba-bom!*  
*Dimi-dimi-dimi* rolls his drum—his necklace  
swings, a rope of skulls!  
His wet locks are the Ganges waters—mighty  
his fire-darting trident!  
See his belt, a gleaming serpent—see the bright  
moon on his forehead!

Rakhal and Tarak danced as they sang. M. notes that Naren, Niranjan, Sarat, Shashi, Kali, Baburam and Sarada Prasanna were also living at the monastery at that time.

Later in the day, Naren returned from Calcutta, where he had been attending to family business. "How is your law-suit going?" Kali asked him; and he replied sharply, "why should you bother about that?" He was in a sternly ascetic

mood, disgusted with the world. "Woman is the gateway to Hell," he said. "Everybody is under the control of Woman." This was not an anti-feminist outburst. Naren was using the word, as Ramakrishna had often used it, to symbolize male Lust.

That night, they celebrated the annual worship of Shiva, the Shiva Ratri, out of doors in the garden. The Shiva Ratri extends from sunset to sunrise, and consists of four periods of worship, during the four watches of the night. When it was over, they breakfasted on fruit and sweetmeats which Balaram had sent them.

Naren was now full of fun, and started to clown. Putting a sweet into his mouth, he stood motionless, mimicking Ramakrishna in samadhi. He fixed his eyes in an unblinking stare. One of the devotees, getting into the spirit of the joke, came forward and supported him, pretending to keep him from falling. Naren closed his eyes for a few moments, then opened them again. With the sweet still in his mouth, he drawled, like one who is just recovering consciousness, "I—am—all—right." The others laughed loudly.

ONE DAY, Rakhal's father came to the monastery and begged him to return home. "Why do you take the trouble to come here?" Rakhal asked him, not unkindly. "I'm very happy here. Please pray to God that you may forget me, and that I may forget you, too."

ON May 7th, Naren came to visit M. at his home in Calcutta. He told M: "I don't care about anything. You see, even now while I'm talking to you, I feel like getting up at this very moment and running away." Then, after a short silence, he

said, "I'm going to fast until death, that I may realize God." "That is good," said M., perhaps with some amusement at Naren's impetuosity. "For God one can do anything."

*Naren:* "But suppose I can't control my hunger?"

*M.:* "Then eat something, and begin fasting again."

They drove out to Baranagore together, to find that Sarada Prasanna had left the monastery during Naren's absence. No one knew where he had gone. Naren was vexed and said that Rakhal should have forbidden him to leave. But Rakhal had been away when it happened, visiting the Dakshineswar Temple. So Naren scolded Harish, saying, "I'm sure you must have been giving one of those lectures of yours, standing with your feet apart! Couldn't you have stopped him?" Harish said meekly that Tarak had asked Sarada Prasanna not to go, but without effect. "You see what troubles I have!" Naren exclaimed to M., "I'm involved in maya, even here! Who knows where this boy is!" However, it was later found that Sarada had left a letter behind him. He wrote that he was going to Vrindavan on foot. "It is very dangerous for me to live here. My mind is going through a change. I used to dream about my parents and other relatives, then I dreamed about Woman, the embodiment of maya. Twice I've been through the suffering of having to go back home. So I am taking myself far away. The Master once told me, 'your people at home are apt to do anything; never trust them.' "

By this time, Rakhal had returned. Hearing the contents of Sarada's letter, he said, "that's the real reason for his going away. He once told me, 'Naren often goes home to look after his mother, brothers and sisters. And he directs the family lawsuit. I'm afraid I may follow his example and start going home too.' " At this, Naren remained silent, as if ashamed.

Then they began to talk of making pilgrimages. Rakhal was in favor of doing this. "What have we achieved by staying

here?" he said, "nothing!" But Naren disagreed, "what will you achieve by wandering around? You're always talking about attaining knowledge of God through discrimination. As if one ever could!"

"Then why have you renounced the world?" a devotee asked Naren. "Must we go on begetting children, just because we haven't realized God?" said Naren, "what are you talking about?"

One of the other disciples, who was lying on the floor, started to pretend that he was in agony, because of his separation from God. He groaned, "why should I go on living? Oh—this pain—I can't stand it! Please—give me a knife!"

"There it is," said Naren, pretending to take him quite seriously, "just stretch out your hand." And they all laughed.

SOME DAYS later, Sarada Prasanna reappeared as suddenly as he had left. His pilgrimage had not been a success, for he had gone no farther than Konnagar, a small town only a few miles distant. However, he had stopped a night at the Dakshineswar Temple and seen Pratap Chandra Hazra, who was giving himself the airs of a paramahansa, now that he felt secure from Ramakrishna's ridicule. Hazra had even had the effrontery to ask Sarada Prasanna, "what do you think of me?" When Sarada did not answer, Hazra demanded tobacco. He seemed to expect to be waited on.

Sarada told all this to M., with humorous simplicity. When M. asked him what he had taken with him on the journey, he answered, "Oh, one or two pieces of cloth and a picture of the Master.... I didn't show the picture to anyone."

SHASHI'S FATHER came to the monastery, wanting to take him home. He had done this before. Shashi dreaded these scenes,

for he loved his parents. On this occasion, he fled through another door and Shashi's father had to be content to talk to M:

*Shashi's Father:* "It's Naren who's the cause of all this trouble. He's the one who's in charge here."

M: "No one is in charge here. They're all equals. What could Naren have to do with it? He couldn't make a man renounce home against his own will. We householders—we haven't been able to renounce our homes, have we?"

*Shashi's Father:* "But what you are doing is the right thing. You are serving both God and the world. Why can't one practice religion in your way? That's just what we want Shashi to do. Let him live at home. He can still come here now and then. You have no idea how his mother weeps for him."

M. felt sad and said nothing.

ONE AFTERNOON, a young devotee named Rabindra burst in upon them, wild-eyed, with a torn wearing-cloth, having run all the way from Calcutta barefoot. Ramakrishna had been fond of Rabindra but had told him, "you will have to go through a few more experiences." And now Rabindra had just discovered that the woman he was in love with was a prostitute. "She's a traitor!" he kept repeating. "I shall never go back. I shall stay with you here."

They advised him to calm himself by bathing in the Ganges. Then one of them took him to a nearby cremation-ground to look at the corpses and meditate on the impermanence of the world.

Rabindra spent that night at the monastery. Next day, he bathed again in the Ganges. When he returned from the river with his wearing-cloth wet, Naren whispered slyly to M:

"It would be good to initiate him into sannyas, right at this moment." Sarada Prasanna brought Rabindra a dry cloth to change into; it was ochre. "Now he has put it on—" Naren exclaimed, "the cloth of renunciation!"

But Rabindra did not become a sannyasin, after all.

SOMETIMES, Naren would seem to argue against the existence of God; then again, he would sing devotional songs and shed tears. The others told him he was inconsistent. He merely smiled.

M. describes an evening on which one of the disciples read from the life of Sri Chaitanya. Perhaps something in the language of the story struck him as antiquated and funny; his tone became sarcastic. At once, Naren snatched the book from his hand, crying, "that's how you spoil the thing that really matters!" Then he read a chapter which told how Chaitanya gave his love to everyone, from brahmin down to untouchable.

*A Disciple:* "I say that one person can't give love to another."

*Naren:* "The Master gave it to me."

*A Disciple:* "Are you sure?"

*Naren:* "What do you know about love? You belong to the servant class. You should all serve me and massage my feet—instead of flattering yourselves you can understand anything. Now go and get me a pipe."

*A Disciple:* "I'll do no such thing!" (*General laughter*)

*M. (to himself):* "The Master certainly endowed all these brothers with spirit. It's no monopoly of Naren's. Can one possibly renounce the world without it?"

MEANWHILE, at Vrindavan, Sarada Devi was becoming more and more completely the being whom later everyone was to

address as Holy Mother. To call her "Mother" was no mere expression of respect. All those who met her often became aware of a maternal quality in her. It was not only Ramakrishna's disciples who were her sons; as she grew older she seemed to inhabit a world made up entirely of her children, and to be genuinely unable, like a mother, to see faults in any of them. The shy young wife of Ramakrishna, who had hidden herself even from his devotees, now became accessible to all who needed her. Yet she acquired no air of authority, no imposing presence. It would even happen that a newcomer mistakenly prostrated herself before Golap Ma her disciple, rather than before this ordinary-looking woman whom Ramakrishna himself had jokingly described as "a cat hidden under the ashes." But the Mother's devotees were overwhelmed by just this very simplicity. Nivedita writes, "to myself, the stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind are almost as wonderful as her sainthood."

At first, the Holy Mother was most unwilling to assume the role of a spiritual teacher. She only began to do so after she had been repeatedly prompted by Ramakrishna in her visions. Again and again she was made conscious of his presence. He appeared at the window of the train carriage in which she was traveling to Vrindavan, and told her not to lose his gold amulet. He appeared to her after her arrival at Vrindavan, saying, "here I am—where did you think I'd gone to? I've only passed from one room into another." She had not been long in Vrindavan before he told her to initiate Jogindra. She could not bring herself to do this, however, until he had appeared to her three more times, telling her the mantra she must use, and until she had found out that Jogindra had also been visited by Ramakrishna and been told to take initiation from her.

In August 1887, the Holy Mother returned to Calcutta.

By now, the monks of Baranagore were setting out on the pilgrimages which were to separate them from each other for months and even years. Only a few of them were to be found at the monastery at any one time. The Holy Mother was worried about this restlessness of her sons; she feared that the Order would dissolve itself. That it did not do so was due, no doubt, to the extraordinarily strong bond of affection between the brothers, to the inspiration given them by Naren and Rakhal even when they were not present, and to the very bohemianism of their monastic life. Most organizations are held together by their rules and therefore dissolved when the rules are broken; but, in this case, there were no rules to break! Also the devotion of Shashi (Ramakrishnananda) to the Master's relics and his performance of the daily worship before them created a powerful spiritual focus at Baranagore; he, at least, never left the monastery. And, within the next few years, a group of new disciples gathered there; young men who had never known Ramakrishna and were to become, so to speak, the second-generation swamis of the Order. In November 1891, the monastery was moved to Alambazar, halfway between Baranagore and Dakshineswar. This house was in much better condition than the other, but it was also regarded as haunted and therefore also cheap.

NAREN and Rakhal both wandered widely about India, sometimes together, more often alone. As was to have been expected, Rakhal had his greatest spiritual experiences in Vrindavan, the scene of Krishna's childhood. At the beginning of 1895, Rakhal finally returned to the monastery, because he felt that it was his duty to serve the Order. Naren had always praised Rakhal's loyalty. "Others may desert me," he used to say, "but Raja will stand by me till death."

In July 1890, Naren resolved to set out on a pilgrimage of indefinite length, even though this meant breaking the last ties of obligation to his family. He went to say good-bye to the Holy Mother and receive her blessing. "If I can become a man in the true sense of the word, then I shall return," he told her. "Otherwise, never." "You must not say that!" the Mother exclaimed, in distress. So Naren, to reassure her, answered, "by your grace I shall be back soon." She urged him to say good-bye also to Bhuvaneswari, but he answered, "you are my only mother now." They were not destined to see each other again for seven years.

At first, Naren traveled with some of his brother monks; then he parted from them and went on alone to Delhi, using one of the names he assumed to avoid recognition. In Delhi he was recognized, nevertheless; so he left again hurriedly. This was the beginning of three years of wanderings which took him through Rajputana down into western India and then southward, by way of Bombay, Poona, Kolhapur and Bangalore. He mixed and talked and ate with all conditions of people; rajas, untouchables, college professors, peasant farmers, Moslems, Jains. He saw the abject poverty and filth and near-starvation in which the many lived, and the dazzling wealth of the very few. He saw crude superstition which disgusted him, true faith which inspired him, apathy and ignorance and laziness which made him furiously impatient, petty jealousies and feuds which drove him to despair. He saw a great people dis-united and degraded; but he saw also the vast potential strength of that people and the possibility of a renaissance which would be more splendid than all the ancient splendors of its history. He saw, almost with clairvoyance, what India might one day be, and what she might have to offer to the rest of the world.

Naren knew no language but the truth. He spoke his mind fearlessly to everyone he met. He rebuked the Maharaja of

Alwar for wasting his time shooting tigers with the English, neglecting his duties to his subjects. The Maharaja, who affected western ideas, said to Naren that it was ridiculous to show reverence to images and pictures, which were nothing but stone, clay, metal or paint. Naren's reply was to tell the Prime Minister to take down the Maharaja's picture from the wall and spit on it. He told the Maharaja of Mysore that he was surrounded by flatterers. When some orthodox brahmins asked him what he considered the most glorious period in Hindu history, he answered, "when five brahmins used to polish off one cow," and he went on to say that Indians ought to give up vegetarianism if they were to compete with other nations in this modern age.

Naren shocked and offended many, but his honesty won him many friends, some of them powerful. The Maharaja of Mysore and his Prime Minister begged him to choose any gift he fancied, the costlier the better. Naren took a tobacco pipe from one and a cigar from the other. The Raja of Ramnad and the Raja of Khetri both urged him to go and speak for Hinduism and India in the West; offering to pay his expenses. They told him about the Parliament of Religions which was to be held in Chicago in 1893 during the World's Columbian Exposition (commemorating the four-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus). They wanted Naren to attend the Parliament as the Hindu delegate. But Naren could give them no definite answer. He was not yet sure of his duty.

And so he continued his journey southward, usually on foot and sharing the food of the very poor, sometimes faint with hunger, until he reached the southernmost point of India, Cape Comorin. When he had worshiped in the temple there, he looked out over the sea and saw a rock. Something moved him to swim out to it, despite the danger of sharks, and there

he sat for a long while, deep in thought. It was one of those occasions in life on which an individual pauses to take his bearings, to become conscious of his destiny, perhaps to accept decisions already subconsciously made but not yet recognized. If the individual is a Naren, such an occasion may later come to be regarded as historic. Looking ahead from that day at Cape Comorin—it was sometime in the winter of 1892—we may see not only its direct relation to certain future events, Naren's two journeys to the West and the founding of the Ramakrishna Mission, but also its indirect influence on the thoughts and lives of India's future leaders, on Gandhi and on the men who followed him.

On the rock at Cape Comorin, Naren had a very powerful emotional experience; a vision of what he and his brothers could do to help India. This experience led him to some practical conclusions which governed his future actions. It will be best to present these conclusions here in non-emotional terms and as simply as possible:

India's greatness is fundamentally religious, but religion is not what India needs in her present state of weakness. India needs education, to enable her to help herself. However, this education will be worthless unless it is directed by people who are living in the spirit of Indian religion, as demonstrated by Ramakrishna; people who have trained themselves in the sciences of the West without losing that spirit; people who have renounced all worldly ties and advantages and dedicated themselves utterly to service. Such people must, obviously, be monks, working together within an organization. Who should provide the funds for this organization? The nations of the West—because India has something equally valuable to offer them in exchange; the spirit of her religion. The West is dangerously weakened by a lack of spirituality, just as India is weakened by a lack of food. The nations of the West must be

persuaded that, if India collapses, they too will collapse. When once they truly believe this, they will stop trying to exploit India. The exchange of values will begin and the whole world will benefit from it.

ON May 31, 1893, Naren sailed from Bombay on board a ship bound for Vancouver, via Colombo, Hong Kong and Japan. After some further hesitations, he had decided to attend the Parliament of Religions. Devotees had contributed money. The Raja of Khetri had given him an orange silk robe, an ocher turban and a first-class steamer ticket. The Raja had also suggested a new monastic name to him and he had agreed to assume it; henceforth he became Swami Vivekananda.

When Vivekananda arrived in Chicago in mid-July he found that the opening of the Parliament had been postponed until September. He had barely enough money to support him through this unforeseen interim; some advised him that he would be able to live more cheaply in Boston, so he took a train on there. During the journey he met a lady who invited him to stay at her home, a farm near Holliston, Massachusetts. Here, he immediately became a local celebrity. He gave talks to church and social groups in the neighborhood. He was taken for a raja, because of his commanding appearance. Children laughed at his turban. Newspapers misspelled his name; their weirdest version of it being "Sivanei Vivcksnanda." Another lady who met him at this time writes, "on Sunday [he was] invited to speak in the church and they took up a collection for a heathen college to be carried on on strictly heathen principles—whereupon I retired to my corner and laughed until I cried. He [Vivekananda] is an educated gentleman, knows as much as anybody. Has been a monk since he was eighteen. Their vows are very much our vows, or rather the vows of a

Christian monk. Only Poverty with them means poverty. . . . He is wonderfully clever and clear in putting his arguments. . . . You can't trip him up nor get ahead of him."

From the first, Vivekananda seems to have adapted himself perfectly to his new surroundings. He inspired, charmed, shocked and amused his hearers; he never played down to them or spared their feelings by modifying his language. "Ah, the English!" he would exclaim, "only just a little while ago they were savages. The vermin crawled on the ladies' bodices." He answered criticisms of Hinduism with equally blunt criticisms of Christianity. Yet his attitude toward America was eagerly receptive. He was quick to learn and praise. When he had been taken to visit a prison near Boston, his reaction was as follows:

How benevolently the inmates are treated, how they are reformed and sent back as useful members of society—how grand, how beautiful, you must see to believe! And oh, how my heart ached to think of what we think of the poor, the low, in India. They have no chance, no escape, no way to climb up. They sink lower and lower every day.

When Vivekananda talked like this, he was not just being broad-minded. There was much in his nature which was akin to the American spirit; for this very reason he was India's ideal ambassador. He was later to write to a friend:

I love the Yankee land—I like to see new things. I do not care a fig to loaf about old ruins. . . . I have too much vigor in my blood for that. In America is the place, the people, the opportunity for everything new.

EARLY in September, his hosts paid his fare back to Chicago, giving him the address of the committee which was in charge

of looking after the delegates to the Parliament. This address Vivekananda lost en route—he was extremely careless in such matters. Rather than hunt through a street directory, it seemed easier to him to revert to the natural behavior of an Indian monk in India; he slept in a boxcar in the railway freight yards, woke "smelling fresh water" (as he put it), followed his nose down to the lakeside, knocked at the doors of some wealthy homes and was rebuffed, and finally reached Dearborn Avenue where he sat down, resigning himself to the will of God. Very soon, a front door opened and a lady came out to him—having already guessed from his clothes why he was in the city. She invited him in to shave and have breakfast and afterwards took him to the headquarters of the committee. "What a romantic deliverance!" said Vivekananda. "How strange are the ways of the Lord!"

When the Parliament opened, on the morning of September 11th, Vivekananda immediately attracted notice as one of the most striking figures seated on the platform. Though powerfully built, he was not above medium height, but he seems always to have created the effect of bigness, together with a masculine grace of movement, often compared to that of a lion or tiger. Others commented on his look of being "inly-pleased"; there was a humorous watchful gleam in his eyes which suggested an amused detachment of spirit. Everyone responded to the deep bell-like beauty of his voice; certain vibrations of it caused a kind of psychic excitement among his hearers. But neither his appearance nor his voice can fully explain the astonishing reaction of the audience to his first speech.

During the first morning's session, when his turn came to speak, he had excused himself, asking for more time. (Later, in a letter to friends in India, he confessed that he had been suffering from stage fright.) But, that afternoon, he rose to his

feet. In his deep voice, he began, "Sisters and Brothers of America"—and the entire audience, many thousand people, clapped and cheered wildly for two whole minutes. Hitherto, the audience had certainly been well-disposed; some of the speakers—including an archbishop of the Greek Church, a member of the Brahmo Samaj, a Confucian and a Buddhist—had been greeted enthusiastically and all of them with adequate politeness. But nothing like this demonstration had taken place. Perhaps the vast majority of those present hardly knew why they had been so moved. A crowd has its own kind of telepathy and this one must have been somehow aware that it was in the presence of that most unusual of all beings, a man whose words express exactly what he means and is. When Vivekananda said, "Sisters and Brothers of America" he literally meant that he regarded the American women and men in front of him as his sisters and brothers; the false old oratorical phrase became simple truth.

As soon as they would let him, the Swami continued his speech. It was a short one, pleading for universal tolerance and stressing the common basis of all religions. When it was over, there was more thunderous applause. A lady who was present recalled later, "I saw scores of women walking over the benches to get near him, and I said to myself, 'Well, my lad, if you can resist that onslaught you are indeed a God!'" She need not have been anxious. Such onslaughts were resisted by Vivekananda almost daily during his subsequent two years of lecturing in America. By the time the Parliament had come to an end, he had become, beyond comparison, its most popular speaker. There was no longer any problem as to how he could continue his mission to the West; he was in demand everywhere, and a lecture bureau was ready to organize his tours.

In those days, when the Frontier was still a living mem-

ory, one did not have to go far from the great cities to find oneself in the pioneer world of the tent show. Politicians, philosophers, writers, the great Sarah Bernhardt herself—all were treated more or less as circus attractions. Vivekananda was a Hindu swami; therefore, in the eyes of the public, he was some kind of a freak. He might hope for applause, but he could expect no consideration for his privacy. He had to face the crudest publicity, the most brutal curiosity, hospitality which was lavish but ruthless and exhausting. This circus-life exhausted him eventually and wrecked his health; but, for the time being, he was equal to it and even seemed to enjoy it.

He offended many by his outspokenness. "I have emptied entire halls!" he used to say, with smiling satisfaction. And no wonder! To the ears of rigid fundamentalists, his teaching of Man's essential divinity must have sounded utterly blasphemous. His favorite story was of a lion who had been raised among sheep and who therefore imagined himself to be a sheep, until another lion showed him his true image reflected in a pool. "And you are lions," he would tell his hearers, "you are pure, infinite and perfect souls. . . . He, for whom you have been weeping and praying in churches and temples, is your own Self." He preached self-reliance, individual search and effort. He warned against too great dependence on the words of others, no matter how divinely inspired. "Obey the Scriptures until you are strong enough to do without them. Every man in Christian countries has a huge cathedral on his head, and on top of that a book. The range of idols is from wood and stone to Jesus and Buddha." "Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realization. Only those who have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light."

He spoke little about the Hindu cults of Rama, Kali,

Vishnu or Shiva, and it was only occasionally that he revealed that he, too, had a personal cult—of the Master whom he regarded as a divine incarnation. After he had returned to India from America, he used to say, "if I had preached the personality of Ramakrishna, I might have converted half the world; but that kind of conversion is short-lived. So instead I preached Ramakrishna's principles. If people accept the principles, they will eventually accept the personality."

FROM 1893 to 1895, Vivekananda lectured in various parts of the eastern and central United States, appearing frequently in Chicago, Detroit, Boston and New York. By the spring of 1895, he was very tired and in poor health; but he made light of it. "Are you never serious?" one of his students asked him, reproachfully. "Oh yes," he answered, "when I have the belly-ache." He could even laugh at the many cranks and so-called healers who unmercifully pestered him, hoping to profit by his reflected glory. In his letters he refers to "the sect of Mrs. Whirlpool" and to a certain mental healer "of metaphysical, chemico, physical-religioso, whatnot." At the same time, he met and made an impression on people of a more serious kind; students who were prepared to dedicate the rest of their lives to the practice of his teaching. In June 1895, he was invited to bring a dozen of these to a house in Thousand Island Park on the St. Lawrence River. Here, for nearly two months, he taught them informally; and this was probably the happiest part of his first visit to America.

In August, he sailed for France and England, returning to New York in December. In April 1896 he returned to England, on what was to be the first stage of his journey home. Vivekananda later admitted that he had arrived in England with very mixed feelings; this was the stronghold of

the exploiters of his country. But the England which he personally experienced proved to have an altogether different spiritual climate. Even after his first brief visit, he wrote that his work had been successful beyond all expectations. "Every enterprise in this country takes some time to get started. But once John Bull sets his hand to a thing, he will never let it go. The Americans are quick, but they are somewhat like straw on fire, ready to be extinguished."

From England, Vivekananda took with him two of his most faithful and energetic disciples, Captain and Mrs. Sevier —also J. J. Goodwin, an Englishman whom he had first met in America and who had become the recorder of his lectures and teachings. Later he was to be followed to India by Margaret Noble (Nivedita), whom he had met in London during his first visit. These western disciples all worked devotedly, in their different ways, for Indian education and freedom.

After leaving England and traveling for a while through Europe, Vivekananda landed in Ceylon on January 15, 1897. From there on, his journey to Calcutta was a triumphal progress; he was received with flags, bands, incense, rose water, flowers and the cheers of thousands. The Raja of Ramnad helped to draw his carriage through the streets and erected a forty-foot column in his honor. At one station, where no stop was scheduled, his admirers threw themselves down on the tracks and would not move until they had seen him. Perhaps Vivekananda's countrymen exaggerated the extent of his material success in America and Europe. But they quite rightly regarded his visit to the West as a psychological triumph far exceeding in its proportions the mere amount of money he had collected for his cause or the number of disciples he had made. Indeed, one may claim that no Indian before Vivekananda had ever persuaded Americans and Englishmen to accept him on such terms—not as a subservient ally, not as an

avowed opponent, but as a sincere well-wisher and friend, equally ready to teach and to learn, to ask for and to offer help.

In the midst of all the adulation, Vivekananda never lost his emotional balance; never forgot who he was, the disciple of Ramakrishna and the equal brother of his fellow monks. (When they had read about his American lectures in the newspapers, they had at first supposed this remarkable swami to be a stranger to them—for they did not know of Naren's new monastic name!) Brahmananda was the first of the Order to welcome him, placing a garland of flowers around his neck. Vivekananda bowed and touched Brahmananda's feet, quoting a saying from the Scriptures, "the son of the guru is to be regarded as the guru himself." Brahmananda returned the act of reverence, with another quotation, "one's elder brother is to be revered as one's father." Vivekananda was then taken to the Alambazar monastery, where he handed over to Brahmananda all the money which had been given him for the work of the future Ramakrishna Mission. Having done this, he was obliged to ask for a few pennies in order to take the ferryboat back across the Ganges. Henceforward, he insisted on sharing the poverty of his brothers.

On May 1, 1897, Vivekananda addressed a meeting of the monks and householder devotees of Ramakrishna, putting before them his plans for an organized Ramakrishna Mission. In brief, they were as follows:

The Mission will preach the truths which Ramakrishna preached and demonstrated in his own life. It will help others to put these truths into practice in their own lives, for their temporal, mental and spiritual advancement. It will train men to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses. It will establish centers for monastic training and social work in different parts

of India. It will also send trained members of the Order to countries outside India, to bring a better relation and a closer understanding between them. Its aims will be purely spiritual and humanitarian; therefore it will have no connection with politics.

It will be seen that Vivekananda's concept of a Mission actually includes a Math (monastery); the two are interrelated. The Swami was fond of quoting Ramakrishna's words, "religion is not for empty stomachs"; but this never meant that he was exalting social service above spiritual training. The stomachs must first be filled, certainly; but the fillers of the stomachs must first be trained to fill them, and trained spiritually as well as technically. Vivekananda knew very well that no one can go on performing the tedious, discouraging tasks of social service unless he has a very powerful ideal to sustain him.

Thus it has come about that the Ramakrishna Order has established its monasteries and social service centers—including hospitals, dispensaries, colleges, schools of agriculture and industry, libraries and publishing houses—side by side. The headquarters of the Math and the Mission are situated in the same compound, at Belur; and the trustees of both are the same. Legally, they are separate entities, but only for the convenience of administrative planning and the allotment of funds. The monks of the Order keep exchanging one way of life for the other, when this is possible; spending some time in meditation and solitude, and then taking up administrative duties at one of the Mission centers. The Order has at the present time over a hundred centers in different parts of India and the neighboring Asian lands. In addition, there are some centers in the West for the study and practice of Vedanta Philosophy and Ramakrishna's teachings; ten of them in the United States, one in England, one in France, and one in Argentina.

The Ramakrishna Order has always obeyed Vivekananda's injunction to keep itself politically uninvolved. During the 1920's, when the struggle with England had become acute, it nevertheless refused its official sanction to Gandhi's Non-Co-operation Movement—and this despite the fact that nearly all of its members must have had a strong sympathy for his cause. Many of Gandhi's followers criticized the Order harshly for its attitude; but Gandhi himself never did so. He understood that a religious body which supports a political cause—no matter how noble and just—can only compromise itself spiritually and thereby lose that very authority which is its justification for existence within human society. In 1921, Gandhi came to the Belur Math on the anniversary of Vivekananda's birthday and paid a moving tribute to him, saying that the Swami's writings had taught him how to love India even more.

IN AMERICA and in England, Vivekananda had contrasted Indian spirituality with Western materialism. In India, we find him attacking Indian sloth and lack of unity, national pride and personal courage; and praising American efficiency and British tenacity and national spirit. Of the English, he would say that "they are, of all nations, least jealous of each other and that is why they dominate the world. They have solved the secret of obedience without slavish cringing—great freedom with law-abidingness." Turning on his Indian followers, he would cry, "you have not the capacity to manufacture a needle and you dare to criticize the English! Fools! Sit at their feet and learn their arts and industries. Without the necessary preparation, what's the use of just shouting in Congress?" And again, "what we want is strength, so believe in yourselves. It is a man-making religion we want. Nationalism of purely agitational pattern cannot carry us far; with patriotism must be

associated a real feeling for others. We must not forget that we have also to teach a great lesson to the world. But the gift of India is the gift of religion and philosophy."

Vivekananda was the last person to worry about formal consistency. He almost always spoke extempore, fired by the circumstances of the moment, addressing himself to the condition of a particular group of listeners, reacting to the intent of a certain question. That was his nature, and he was supremely indifferent if his words of today seemed to contradict those of yesterday. As a man of enlightenment, he knew that the truth is never contained in arrangements of sentences. It is within the speaker himself. If what he is, is true, then words are unimportant. In this sense, Vivekananda is incapable of self-contradiction.

However, it is not at all surprising that he has been much misunderstood; that parts of his message, taken out of context, have been presented as the whole. Even some of his brother monks, at the time of the founding of the Mission, were afraid that he was deviating from Ramakrishna's aims. And there have been some, in much more recent times, who have claimed him as a socialist and a nationalist revolutionary. They wish, in all sincerity, to honor Vivekananda as a great Indian patriot, and they are right as far as they go. But their statue of him would have to be a headless torso without arms or legs; Vivekananda without Ramakrishna.

THE MISSION went into action as soon as it had been established, taking part in famine and plague relief and beginning to found hospitals and schools. Vivekananda became its General President and Brahmananda the head of the Calcutta center. Then the first buildings were erected on the land which the Order had purchased at Belur, and the Math was opened there, in January 1899.

In June 1899, Vivekananda sailed for his second visit to the West. He spent most of it in America, training small groups in different parts of the country and opening centers at places where devotees had urgently requested him to do so. He returned to India late in 1900, a sick and exhausted man. He said frequently that he did not expect to live much longer. But he seemed calmer and happier than he had ever been; quite released from the driving anxious energy of his earlier crusading years. His mood is beautifully described in a letter he wrote to one of his disciples, in April 1900:

I am well, very well mentally. I feel the rest of the soul more than that of the body. The battles are lost and won. I have bundled my things and am waiting for the Great Deliverer. . . .

After all, Joe, I am only the boy who used to listen with rapt wonderment to the wonderful words of Rama-krishna under the banyan at Dakshineswar. That is my true nature—works and activities, doing good and so forth, are all superimpositions. Now I again hear his voice. . . . Now only the voice of the Master calling.—“I come, Lord, I come.” . . .

I am glad I was born, glad I suffered so, glad I did make big blunders, glad to enter peace. I leave none bound, I take no bonds. Whether this body will fall and release me or I enter into freedom in the body, the old man is gone, gone for ever, never to come back again!

The guide, the guru, the leader, the teacher, has passed away; the boy, the student, the servant, is left behind. . . .

Behind my work was ambition, behind my love was personality, behind my purity was fear, behind my guidance the thirst for power. Now they are vanishing and I drift. I come, Mother, I come. . . .

It is said that Vivekananda's departure from this life, on July 4, 1902, had the appearance of being a premeditated act.

For several months previously, he had been releasing himself from his various duties, and training successors. But his health was better that day and he ate his noon meal with relish. He also talked philosophy with some of his brother monks, gave a Sanskrit lesson for three hours to a class of novices and went for a two-mile walk with Premananda during the afternoon. In the evening he went into his room and spent an hour in meditation. Then he called the disciple who was his personal attendant and asked him to open all the windows and to fan his head. Vivekananda lay down on his bed; the disciple thought he must be asleep or in deep meditation. Shortly after nine, his hands trembled a little and he breathed once, very deeply. A minute passed. Again he breathed deeply, in the same manner. Then his eyes and face became fixed in an expression of ecstasy. A little blood appeared around his mouth, in his nostrils and in his eyes.

When the doctors arrived, they thought at first that animation was only suspended. They tried artificial respiration for at least two hours. At midnight they had to admit that there was no more hope. They gave the cause of death as apoplexy or heart failure. But the brothers of the Order were convinced that he whom they had called Naren and Vivekananda had at last, as Ramakrishna had predicted, become aware of his true identity.

If a successor to Vivekananda had had to be elected, none of the brothers would have hesitated; he could have been no other than their Raja, Ramakrishna's spiritual son. But no such choice was necessary. Among Vivekananda's many acts which later seemed to have been a preparation for his departure was his resignation from the presidency of the Mission, more than a year before he died. Brahmananda had succeeded him in

February 1901, and was to remain in office as president of both Math and Mission for the next twenty-one years.

I have spoken already of the transformation of Sarada Devi from the shy young wife of Ramakrishna into the Holy Mother of the Order. An equally great transformation may be said to have taken place in Rakhal, the gentle and yielding boy who became the almost superhumanly wise and powerful Brahmananda. Under his direction the Ramakrishna Math and Mission were shaped and Vivekananda's plans translated into action.

Brahmananda was a great administrator of the Mission's activities, but he constantly reminded his disciples and fellow workers that spirituality comes first, social service second. "The only purpose of life is to know God," he would tell them. "Attain knowledge and devotion; then serve God in mankind. Work is not the end of life. Disinterested work is a means of attaining devotion. Keep at least three fourths of your mind in God. It is enough if you give one fourth to service."

He was very particular about the source of any money that was offered to the Mission, and about the motives with which it was offered. A millionaire once came to them saying that he was ready to renounce the world; they could have his entire fortune. But Brahmananda refused. He was aware that the man, although quite sincere, was only acting on the impulse of the moment. He would have regretted his offer later.

Brahmananda was far more concerned for the spiritual growth of his disciples than for their practical efficiency. He once reprimanded a senior monk who had been put in charge of a novice: "did I send this young boy to you to make into a good clerk?" The success of a religious order, he said, must be judged by the inner life of each of its members, not by its achievements in social service.

As head of the Order he was of course empowered to

make the final decision whether or not to expel a monk who had been guilty of serious misbehavior. But he never made such decisions. Often he did not deal directly with the offense itself; instead, he would send for the culprit and have him meditate daily in his presence and render him personal service. On such occasions, the effect of his immense spiritual power and love would be witnessed by all. The culprit would become transformed. Brahmananda's care for others extended far beyond the ordinary human limits of compassion; indeed it was supernatural, for, as he occasionally admitted, he was at all times in mental communication with everybody in the Order and aware of all their problems. He knew that he could give spiritual help whenever it was needed, even at a long distance; and this knowledge made him magnificently unanxious and serene.

However, it should not be supposed that he was over-lenient with his disciples. He would even subject a monk to public humiliation and dismissal from his presence; especially if he regarded that monk as having exceptional qualities and if he wished to train him for some difficult duty. Often, the apparent offense was something quite trivial. For example, a young monk who was performing the ritual worship had used three matches instead of one to light the lamps before the shrine; Brahmananda scolded him severely for lack of concentration. This caused some of the disciples to suspect that Brahmananda's rebukes were not what they seemed to be, but perhaps a method of destroying the disciple's bad karma. As one of them has written, "the chastening of a disciple never began until after he had enjoyed several years of love and kind words. These experiences were painful at the time but they were later treasured among the disciple's sweetest memories. It often happened that even while the disciple was being rebuked by Maharaj he would feel a strange undercurrent of

joy. The indifference of Maharaj was the only thing we could not have borne, but Maharaj was never indifferent. The very fact that he could speak to us in this way proved that we were his children, his own."

It has been said that Brahmananda was so entirely fearless that others could not feel fear in his presence. Once, when he was walking with two devotees in the woods of Bhubaneswar, a leopard appeared and came straight toward them. He stood still and confronted it calmly until it turned tail. Again, while he was going along a narrow lane in Madras, attended by two young monks, a mad bull came charging to meet them. The young men tried to protect their guru, who was already an elderly man, by standing in front of him; but he pushed them behind him with extraordinary strength and fixed his eyes upon the bull. It stopped, shook its head from side to side, and then trotted quietly away.

Brahmananda was tall and well-built, with eyes that were sometimes deeply searching and sometimes apparently unseeing, as though they were regarding an altogether different reality. His hands and feet were beautifully formed. His back strikingly resembled Ramakrishna's—to such a degree that Turiyananda once caught sight of Brahmananda walking ahead of him in the gardens of Belur and believed for a moment that he must be having a vision of the Master himself. Once, in a crowded railway station, one of his disciples overheard the conversation of two men who had been watching Brahmananda with great interest. One of them remarked that it was impossible to guess his nationality; he didn't seem to belong to any of the Indian races. The other man agreed, adding, "but you can see very well that he's a man of God."

Brahmananda did not have the eloquence of a Vivekananda. He inspired people by his silences quite as much as by his words. It is said that he could change the psychological at-

mosphere in a room, making the occupants feel talkative and gay and then inclining them to silent meditation, without himself saying anything. For the most part, his teachings were very simply expressed. "Religion is a most practical thing. It doesn't matter whether one believes or not. It is like science. If one performs spiritual disciplines, the result is bound to come. Although one may be practicing mechanically —if one persists one will get everything in time. . . . And if you go one step toward God, God will come a hundred steps toward you. . . . Why did God create us? So that we may love him." When one of his disciples asked permission to practice some severe spiritual austerities, Brahmananda asked, "why need you do that? We have done it all for you." He treated Ramlal, Ramakrishna's nephew, with the greatest respect and made the young disciples bow down before him, because he had the blood of the family into which the Master had been born. But Ramlal would protest that he himself had never truly recognized his uncle's greatness until his eyes had been opened to it by Brahmananda. Once, when a famous musician was performing, a devotee complained that he had played no devotional songs. Brahmananda, who loved music, replied, "don't you realize that sound itself is Brahman?"

"It's good to laugh every day," he used to say, "it relaxes the body and the mind." There are many stories of his fondness for practical jokes. On one occasion, Akhandananda, who had been staying with Brahmananda, said that he must leave next morning and return to his own mission center at Sargachi. Brahmananda pleaded with him to stay a little longer, but the Swami insisted; so a palanquin was hired to take him to the railway station, several miles away. As the train left very early, it was necessary to start in the small hours of the night. Akhandananda did not notice that Brahmananda had

whispered some instructions to the palanquin bearers. Having said good-bye to Maharaj, he settled down to doze in the darkness, with the curtains of the palanquin drawn. The journey seemed very long and the stops were frequent. The Swami called anxiously to the bearers from behind the curtains; he was afraid that he would miss the train. They reassured him, saying that there was plenty of time. At last they put down the palanquin and asked him to alight. When he parted the curtains to do so, there stood Brahmananda, as if ready to welcome him back after months of absence. Then Akhandananda realized that he had simply been carried round and round the compound in the dark. Brahmananda embraced him and the two of them laughed like children.

ALTHOUGH the Holy Mother was not a member of the Order she was, in a sense, its real head. Any wish or opinion expressed by her was regarded by Brahmananda and his brothers as a command to be obeyed without question. To them, the Mother was one with the Mother of the Universe and thus as holy as Ramakrishna himself. There were times when the Mother would indirectly acknowledge the existence of this Presence within her. In her family there was a female relative who was insane. Once this unfortunate woman began to curse the Holy Mother, crying, "let her die!" The Mother commented quietly, "she does not know that I am deathless."

Toward the end of her life, she fell sick of a recurring fever; her flesh wasted away and she became very weak. It was decided to move her from Jayrambati to the house which had been built for her in Calcutta. She was now too weak to leave her bed, and those around her noticed that she showed a growing detachment from everything earthly. She, who had cared for them all as her own children—who had recently

stopped an attendant who was fanning her, saying, "I can't sleep, thinking how your hand will ache"—now received the news of her beloved brother's death without shedding a tear. "Whatever work the Master wanted done by this body seems to be over," she said, "now my mind longs for him and wants nothing else." She began dismissing her closest relatives, sending them away to Jayrambati and elsewhere, as if to spare them the pain of her departure. One of the devotees cried, "Mother, what will become of us?" She answered, "why are you afraid? You have seen the Master." Not long after midnight, on July 21, 1920, she passed into her mahasamadhi.

BRAHMANANDA spent the last years of his life in a state of high spiritual consciousness, coming down from it only in order to help and teach others. He began to have the vision of Ramakrishna almost every day; not only seeing him but also talking with him. And yet, in conversation with strangers who came to visit the Mission, he would discuss a variety of worldly topics with intelligence and apparent interest; only his intimate disciples were aware that he remained completely detached.

In 1922, shortly after the celebrations of Ramakrishna's birthday, Brahmananda had a slight attack of cholera. This was followed by a serious diabetic condition. He suffered greatly for several days, but his mood was ecstatic; for he had visions of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and other brothers who were no longer alive in the body. He heard Krishna calling him to dance and he exclaimed, "put anklets on my feet—I want to dance with Krishna!"

There was no coma at the end as is usual in cases of diabetes. He had clear consciousness of his surroundings. His eyes were brilliant. He was perfectly calm. His last words to his disciples were, "do not grieve, I shall be with you always." On April 10, 1922, he left the body in samadhi.

RAMAKRISHNANANDA said of Brahmananda, while he was still alive, "Maharaj's mind has become one with the mind of Ramakrishna." Shivananda, speaking to a disciple of Brahmananda who was leaving to take up his duties as resident swami at one of the centers in the United States, expressed himself even more strongly: "Never forget that you have seen the Son of God. You have seen God." That same disciple, writing many years later, says, "he was our father, mother, and everything. After his passing away I felt no void. As long as Maharaj was in the physical body there was a barrier. Afterwards, the barrier was gone. I know that Maharaj is still living—and helping all of us."

"A BAND of minstrels suddenly appears, dances and sings. Then, just as suddenly, it departs." At this point, our story reaches its natural end.

The story that continues is that of a growing organization, and of the men and women who have helped to make Ramakrishna and his message more and more widely known throughout the world. But this book is about Ramakrishna the phenomenon; and a phenomenon has no concern with its aftereffects. If God does actually visit the earth from time to time in human form, is he any the more or the less God because of the number of his disciples or the size of the Church they later build for him?

The biographer of an ordinary "great man" is expected to conclude his work by assessing his hero's achievements, comparing him with other important figures of his period who were active in the same field, and assigning him a "place in history." I hope it will be obvious that any such attempt here would be meaningless.

To the best of my ability, the phenomenon has been de-

scribed. How should one interpret it? How react to it? Should it be dismissed from the mind, as something irrelevant and inconveniently out of line with everyday experience? Or should it be taken as the starting-point of a change in one's own ideas and life?

These questions I must leave to each individual reader—just as Saradananda and M. and the other writers about Rama-krishna leave them to me.

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## WHAT VEDANTA MEANS TO ME

E. RAPHAEL MAROZZI

INDIA is the "Blessed Punya Bhumi (Holy Land)" as said by Swami Vivekananda and has "deluged the earth again and again with the pure and perennial waters of spiritual truth." The very fiber of the nation is spiritual life and its genius lies in the realization of spiritual values. Its meaning and function to the world-at-large is to manifest, preserve, and to give forth the great spiritual truths it has been heir to from time immemorial. Addressing the nation on this point the great Swami said, "That intense faith in another world . . . that intense faith in God, that intense faith in the immortal soul is in you." All the philosophical systems of India (except Charvaka, materialism) state that the ultimate goal of man is moksha—spiritual perfection or freedom.

That this is so is now known and fully accepted by us and the meaning of this is to some extent realized. But some twenty years of our life in one of the most literate and progressive of countries kept obscured this most needful and vital knowledge. It was the era in our life in which scientific thinking opened to question time-honored ideals and values and affected young students' minds which became skeptical about the existence of God, soul, hereafter, and generally the teachings of church and philosophy. Men of science became the heroes of the day, their statements the scriptures, and Human skepticism was the intellectual fashion of the times. This much can be attributed

to the ills and growing pains of the age—but there was a worse element to confuse our thinking and to obscure our mind from the precious and profound truths of India. That was the narrowness and bigotry of the churches adhering to their own dogmas and denying all else, together with the prejudice and propaganda planted in America by the enemies of Indian ideology for their own selfish ends. This latter, by prolonged application of hundreds of years, had taken root in schools and churches to such an extent that the effect of this on our mind was such ignorance that one of the questions asked in our first interview with Swami Vividishananda of the Rama-krishna Mission was, "Does India have many books?"

This is not to say, however, that only these external conditions were responsible for our state of obscuration and ignorance for we know our own karma was there to place us in such an environment to prevent the light and knowledge of India from coming through. The result of the above-mentioned dogmatic bigotry of the churches and science-oriented skepticism on one hand, and the propaganda-caused obscuration of India's ideals on the other, was a belligerent atheism to the extent that anyone who raised the subject of religion in our presence was in danger of having his faith shaken as a result of the ensuing verbal battle. Of course, we hasten to admit that that position was a very unhappy one for us and therefore we kept up our search for what life must mean, if it had a meaning, just as we had in our childhood when we continually asked parents, teachers, preachers, priests, ministers, philosophers, etc., the *raison d'être*, but with no satisfactory answer. This search for the reality, the meaning, the purpose of life went on by the study of art, music, literature, philosophy, science, psychology, psycho-analysis, etc. for a number of years with inevitable frustrations punctuated with momentary discoveries of light which

promptly vanished into the gloom of delusion and confusion. Secular knowledge, rooted in the finite, cannot reveal the Infinite, the Real, the One, but only wants to negate It. Division being endless, the more one knows of relative things—the many—the more one specializes, the vaster becomes the field of knowledge and therefore, the less one knows. "That knowledge knowing which all things are known" (the theme of the Mundaka Upanishad) is not a knowledge of the many, the finite, but of the One, the Infinite.

So we had periods of bleakness, loneliness, and vacuity reaching the point of despair when sometimes we took refuge in the idea that self-destruction could end this terrible imbalance of unrelieved struggle and suffering at one end and, at the other end, nothingness—. The mind went along with Schopenhauer in his pessimistic moods—life must be some kind of mistake—and when it becomes unbearable death comes to relieve it. But then there is beauty "which is a joy . . . that takes away the pall from our dark spirit"—the ecstasy of aesthetic contemplation, the bliss of love, the happiness in helping others. How to understand the contradictions?

Oriental art—especially the paintings and sculpture—at the Art Institute of Chicago (the same building in which Swami Vivekananda delivered his lectures at the famous Parliament of Religions—a spatial coincidence we like to think was providentially related to our later development) led us to look into the philosophy of India and the various yogas as found in popular books in the public libraries. This was followed by attempts to practice meditation as well as hatha-yoga postures and pranayamas (breathing exercises). The difficulties encountered soon became insurmountable and, hastening to seek out a teacher, we found that Swami Vividishananda was lecturing in Seattle—a city near which

we had been transferred because of military induction.

It is said that a spiritual man is one who can transmit religion. We went to the Swami with an agnostic bias and soon found that we were easily accepting spiritual truths we had been prejudiced against for many years. Prejudiced because we rebelled against accepting blindly the authoritarian dogma of the churches, based on ancient writings considered sacred and absolute, especially that man is born in sin and irrevocably consigned to the flames eternally unless he can take refuge in the church and lead a life of moral and ethical perfection—in spite of his inherent sinful nature and the man with the pitchfork (the personification of evil) making sure that he does not make much headway. Those who try to play this nearly hopeless game must wait until some unknown, indefinite time after death to hear the verdict whether or not they have succeeded. Of all this there is no kind of proof or verification. (It was only after studying Vedanta that we understood the true meaning of Christ's teachings.) Vedanta stands for spiritual experience immediately apprehended and for individual verification of its teachings. Spiritual experience means Self-realization. Neither spiritual knowledge nor true happiness can be had by following the avenues of the senses outwardly; they are to be found within the center of consciousness and are identical with the divine Self. The faith that Vedanta asks is faith in one's divine nature (no sinner here), faith in the teacher and the teachings—a faith that is to be verified here and now by one's own experience. The Swami spoke as one with authority, not only from his own experience but from that of his teacher Swami Brahmananda, who was a perfected disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Here was religion as a living reality and not theories and doctrines or simply a vocation. Sri Ramakrishna was one who in his lifetime experienced the

entire gamut of the spiritual experiences of mankind and concluded that all religions are different paths to the same goal and Truth is One. In keeping with our scientific outlook, we believed that Truth must be universal and cannot be circumscribed and limited by exclusiveness and sectarianism. So here was the answer—Truth is One and is to be apprehended immediately by experience and realization. "This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms are but secondary details."

WHAT Vedanta has meant to us we shall try to sum up in the frame of a famous Vedic chant, and firstly say about Turiya, the "Truth of truth." Man is miserable, being confined in the city of nine gates (body) and functioning in the states of waking, dream, and sleep. The "truth" is that he is a divine soul functioning in a body and mind, and because of that soul he has consciousness, he thinks, feels, wills, sees, hears, etc. in the realm of the three states which are characterized by limitations of time, space, cause, name, and form. The "Truth of truth" is that man is only apparently this; in reality he is a divine being unconditioned by time, space, cause, name or form and does not function in any state except Turiya (illumination or freedom) and is always the immutable divine Reality. It is knowing this and having this before us as a goal of life that opened up for us new vistas and made life's struggles meaningful and worthwhile. There is no happiness in things finite (the Chandogya Upanishad tells us)—the finite of the three states and embodied existence. The Infinite is all joy and it is our true Self. Though not realized yet, that joy in part has entered our life and actions and has transformed our philosophical outlook and behavior from darkness to light and we are being led from the unreal to the Real and from death to immortality, as per the well-known prayer from the Yajur Veda.

Whereas the Real was heretofore a subject for philosophical discussion only, for it was the unknown and unknowable of Spencer, beyond human experience and therefore best to ignore it and be agnostic; it was afterwards understood to be the essence of all being—human and other—impossible to deny, it being our very consciousness. Though unknowable as being beyond the limited (unpurified) human mind, it can be experienced as the highest state of Being. Indeed this is the goal of human existence and the meaning and value of life.

It is not an abstract mental idea (as heretofore thought) but the most tangible entity in relation to which this three-dimensional world of space-time is an unreal appearance and is chimerical in nature. The age-old riddles of good and evil, creation and creator, man and God, puzzling over which led us to pessimism and atheism, were now happily solved by the Vedantic view of Reality. *Tat Tvam asi* (That Thou Art) is indeed a bold statement which none in the West dared to make and by it is explained what is Reality, man, and his relation to It, as well as being the metaphysical foundation of ethical and moral values and the laws of righteousness (dharma).

Life seems to end in death—a contradiction which “must give us pause.” Our pause consisted in the study of psychic phenomena and after-death states, and by pondering the age-old problem especially when it came into bold relief by the death of a near and dear one. This may well be the oldest of philosophical questions. In the Katha Upanishad, Nachiketas asks it and the answer given reveals the immortal nature of the soul of man as a divine Reality (Brahman) “whose food are the brahmin and the kshatriya, and Death but condiment.” Man—true man—is the ultimate Reality and all changes are but passing shadows. Thus we are led out of death to immortality.

Ignorance heretofore was thought of as lack of secular knowledge, or lack of education or cultural development. In Vedanta ignorance is the root cause of embodiment, of misery, of limitation, and of karma. When man—the divine Self—arrogates to himself anything that is non-Self, that is, anything belonging to the objective universe including body and mind, that is ignorance and it is this which imprisons man in the three states and obstructs him from the fourth state of spiritual Knowledge and Freedom. The effect of this kind of understanding upon us was somewhat like the man who, though possessed by a ghost, thinks he is all right and then is made to discover his sad plight. To be exorcised from this ghost is the ultimate victory and all weapons must be brought to bear on this point—moral and ethical practices; discrimination of the Real from the unreal, Self from non-Self; detachment and renunciation; control of mind, control of senses, self-withdrawal, etc.; all spiritual practices and disciplines known to man plus the grace of God are to be used against this arch-enemy. By this, then, we are being led from the darkness of ignorance to spiritual light.

Following a trip to India's holy places in 1950 we settled in Honolulu where, due to the East West inter-cultural interest of the people, a study group easily developed with the purpose of meeting in classes for the study of traditional Vedanta texts. Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission have come to instruct and it is a beautiful experience to see a sincere devotee who has found a way to Truth. Then we think how the fruit of many lives must converge to bring this about. Thus we are seeing how Vedanta enriches, transforms and illumines the lives of others and we know that what Vedanta means to us—which is really beyond words to say—is not more significant than what it means in the lives of others.

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## SHANTI ASHRAMA

BLANCH PARTINGTON

IN August 1900, Swami Turiyananda, a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, journeyed with a dozen men and women devotees from San Francisco to an isolated spot in the San Antonio Valley of California, where he established the first Vedanta retreat in America. It was located fifty miles from the nearest railway station and twelve miles from the nearest town. They called it Shanti Ashrama (Peace Retreat).

Swami Turiyananda had traveled far to found the Shanti Ashrama. He was born as Harinath Chatterjee in Calcutta in 1863. When he was in his teens he met Sri Ramakrishna, who saw the young brahmin as the perfect embodiment of the renunciation taught in the Bhagavad-Gita—and accepted him as a disciple. Shortly after Sri Ramakrishna's death in 1886, Hari joined his brother disciples in taking monastic vows, and after a brief stay at their monastery near Calcutta he spent several years making pilgrimages in northern India.

In 1899, when Swami Vivekananda planned to visit America for the second time in order to give an impetus to the work he had begun six years earlier as Hindu delegate of the World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago, he asked his brother monk Turiyananda to accompany him, saying that he wanted to show the West an example of an ideal Hindu sannyasin. At first Turiyananda refused, preferring to continue his austere life of spiritual practice and scriptural study in familiar sur-

roundings. Finally he agreed to accompany Vivekananda, and in August 1899 the two Swamis arrived in New York where Turiyananda held lectures and classes on Vedanta for nearly a year. In the meantime, an American devotee had offered Vivekananda one hundred and sixty acres in the San Antonio Valley of Santa Clara County, California, to be used as a retreat. Vivekananda accepted the property and asked Turiyananda to take charge of it. Turiyananda spent the greater part of the next two years at the Ashrama, instructing the devotees in spiritual matters and meditating and working with them, going only occasionally to San Francisco in order to give lectures. He was a scholarly and austere man. Yet Westerners and Easterners alike found him easily approachable. He had a compassionate heart and great breadth of vision, and his manifest spirituality inspired many to devote themselves to the realization of God.

In 1902, the Swami's health began to break down, and he returned to India where he practiced spiritual disciplines in solitude for about eight years. Thereafter he lived in one or another of the monasteries of the Ramakrishna Order, instructing the young monastics, until his death in 1922.

Two weeks after Swami Turiyananda had started the Shanti Ashrama, Blanch Partington, a reporter from the San Francisco Chronicle, arrived to write an article about the retreat for her paper. It was published August 26, 1900, and is reproduced below, with the original spelling. Although Miss Partington's story reflects the fact that she was a casual observer of a religious experiment and not a spiritual aspirant, it has the special merit of eyewitness reporting. Her impressions of the daily routine at the Ashrama and her accounts of conversations with Swami Turiyananda and the devotees contribute a valuable record to the history of the Vedanta movement in America.

"They are Theosophists."

"They are Altruarians."

"They are Shakers."

"They are Bellamy students, who are going to build a new Utopia."

"They are celibates, vegetarians, faith cure cranks."

"They are—"

These are some of the things that are said by the mystified people of the San Antone valley concerning a small body of men and women who are seeking righteousness by the route of Hindoo philosophy.

Strange rumors of the coming of a peculiar people to their peaceful lowlands began to be rife among the denizens of San Antone valley more than a month ago. From San Jose, where the mysterious party left the beaten track of civilization, to the heights of Mount Hamilton, down its steep dips and curves on the other side; through the smiling Ysabel valley, across the dry winding bed of the Coyote river; about the great "beef fields" of the stock ranches, to the San Antone valley itself, where they have made their home, the fame of this strange people is blown abroad, and wild and weird are the accounts of them.

"You do not know them?" I was invariably asked, as in my little pilgrimage to the "Shanti Ashrama," which means Peaceful Retreat, I sought the countryside point of view of the work and ideals of the Philosophic invaders of the quiet valley.

"I have come all the way from San Francisco to find out about them," was my reasonably disingenuous answer, for your country folk are gentle people and would not criticize your friends even upon invitation, and I must admit more knowledge of the subject than my queries gave me credit for. But points of view are so fascinating, and the large latitude for the imagination in the mysterious doings of this new cult so

tempting that I fell by the wayside into the sin of the listener. As we neared the valley in the wilderness the reports grew more intimate and picturesque. As we went down the farther slopes of Mount Hamilton, with ineffably beautiful vistas of brown and golden hills, opening at either side, the driver of the neat little rig which carried me to my destination told me what "they said."

Darker and more wonderful grew the tales as the twilight deepened into night, and the distant glimmer of a campfire told of the whereabouts of the mysterious company. Tales of mesmeric marvels, of how the dusky Hindoo monk, the Swami Turyananda, leader of the little band of truthseekers, had hypnotized his American disciples; how they sat in mystic circles around the campfire at night, chanting mysterious harmonies; how strange things might be seen rising from the flames and gliding in and about the hoary old oaks surrounding the magic fire, were one willing to adventure within range of the influence—all this he told me.

"Not that I believe the stories," the sturdy mountaineer said, with a hunter's disregard for aught but the sportsman's superstitions, but we were both curiously silent as we drove into the "Shanti Ashrama," and came upon the very scene described by the imaginative villagers.

In a stillness almost absolute, broken only by the light hiss of the living flame leaping upward to the velvety blue-black sky and the faint murmur of far pines, the worshipers of the divine, as known to the Hindoos, sat in charmed circle. At one side, immobile as a bronze Buddha, and in the immemorial position assumed by that ancient teacher of men, sat the Swami Turyananda, and about him his disciples, all with closed eyes, and a look of rapt contemplation upon their quiet faces. Now and again the deep musical chant of a Sanscrit hymn, intoned in a rich, low voice, broke the silence; then

again only the song of the pines was heard, and the worshipers sat in as utter an unconsciousness of the stranger in their midst and the mundane world as if they had been in the innermost recesses of the Himalayan mountains whence comes their teacher.

At last one of the silent figures rose, bade me welcome warmly and sped the kindly driver and the huntsman who had guided us the last few miles; then took me to the camp kitchen and prepared a needed meal, entertaining me until the sacred ceremonial around the fire was at an end. Then we joined the worshipers.

Once within the cheerful circle of the blaze, and in range of its grateful warmth, the camp seemed much as other camps but for the picturesque and unusual figure of the leader, Swami Turyananda, garbed in a robe of elusive gray, dark as is the wont of the children of the sun, with bright, black eyes, a brow covered with fine lines of thought, a mild and gracious mien, yet withal an indefinable air of an absolute aristocracy. He was a singular figure at a good American campfire. The others, the chelas or disciples, curiously enough twelve in number, are simply good United States citizens, with the usual brown face and country rig of the average camper, short skirts and sunbonnets included, for they are mostly women. But it is a strange camp nevertheless.

IMAGINE in a country swarming with deer, jack rabbits, dove, quail and all kinds of game a camp without a gun. Imagine Sanscrit chants 'round the camp fire at night instead of the classic "Clementine" and the "Spanish Cavalier!" Imagine discussions on the cosmic evolution and its purpose in the place of hunters' tales of derring-do in the woods! Imagine, in short, every ideal of the ordinary camp displaced and a resolute hunt

after the inner "potential divinity" of man substituted and you have the "Shanti Ashrama."

"I have come to write about you, Swami," I confessed at length when the meditative atmosphere had been somewhat dispelled and I found courage to bring the outer world into the philosophers' retreat.

"Many miles we have come to get away from civilization, and lo! it is at our heels again," smiled the Swami, and seeing my camera—which suddenly seemed to take on a profane air—he chanted, "Shiva, Shiva, Shiva!" which I find, is the utmost expression of amused annoyance permitted to rise to the gentle lips of these Hindoo thinkers.

"But you will permit? And will you not tell me in many words what you wish to do here, the ideal and puri for which the Shanti Ashrama has been founded?"

"Surely," he said, "but we shall find it all at the beginning of the 'Raja Yoga,' which Swami Vivekananda wrote and translated. Let us read; it is here:

"Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal.

"Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy, by one or more or all of these—and be free.

"This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are all but secondary details."

"You use certain physical means to your end, as, for instance, the control of the breath, refraining from certain foods, and so on. What is the philosophy of that?" I asked.

"Simply that it is always easier to control that which is gross than that which is fine. First, control the body by means of controlling the breath, the principal gross motion of the body, the finer perceptions will inevitably follow. The power of concentration, by which all knowledge is attained, is most

"readily reached in this manner, the reflective power of the mind most readily aroused. Concentration on external things is less difficult. It is the study of the mind, by the mind itself, through which the soul is known that we are attempting here, and through perfectly simple and practical methods, which you will find well explained in the Raja Yoga."

"Are you all going to be Swamis—Yogis?" I asked of the interested circle, who were regarding the wise, child-like face of their teacher with evident love and admiration.

"In some distant future," smiled one of them. "But the retreat is founded, and we hope it will be the center of attraction for this kind of thought all through America. It is the Shanti Ashrama outside of India, and California, with its possibilities of outdoor life, is certainly the happiest situation possible for one."

And then they told me that the land had been the gift of one of them, Miss Boock—160 acres of it, a veritable wilderness, 40 miles from any railroad and comfortably distant from the distractions of civilization.

"Shiva, Shiva, Shiva!" said the Swami again, once more regarding the incongruous camera. "You told me, Chetana," he said, smiling at one of the members, "that we must have the retreat a little Americanized, and it is here. Shiva, Shiva, Shiva!"

And Chetana merely replied that nothing these days was sacred from the photographic eye and then explained to me the curious situation in the valley, once thickly settled. Swiss-Italians and Germans and others came to farm the fertile plains, and for a time the place was musical with the hum of many voices. But water was difficult to obtain and transportation prohibitive and the little colony left the beautiful valley in despair. Now there are houses without inhabitants, a school-house without scholars, wells without water, and barns with-

out grain. Great stock ranches have grown up in their stead, one near by 44,500 acres in extent, and to these things are due the desirable solitude which surrounds the Ashrama.

"Swami, always at our campfires we told ghost stories. Won't you please tell us an Indian spirit tale—have you ever seen a ghost yourself?" American audacity inquired of the sage.

And the weirdness of things came back, as the Swami said, with uttermost simplicity, "Yes, I think so, but it may have been hallucination. It was once in our monastery in India. I was walking down the hall with a friend and we met a stranger coming toward us, who turned off into an unused room. I followed him to tell him that there was nothing and no one there, but he had completely disappeared when I entered the room. My friend did not see him at all, and afterward I heard that a man of his description had killed himself in the house. Of course, as I said, it may have been hallucination, and it may not; there are such things."

"It is nothing but the play of children, and ghosts are the spirits of those who have not sense to know they are dead," said the Swami, and, with a blessing toward east and west and north and south he betook himself to his tent for the night. Thirteen tents there are and a log cabin, and, with kindly courtesy, this nearest approach to a house was assigned to me.

STRANGE DREAMS were mine that night, of mahatmas, and sacred fires and wandering spirits, and in the morning, when the sun shone brightly through every clink in the little cabin, I wakened with the sound of a church organ in my ears, hardly knowing if I were not still sleeping. It was the Swami, chanting an early morning hymn to the sun and arousing the sleepers to Hindoo matins. Most of the disciples were gathered about the ashes of last evening's fire when I came out into

the wonderful dawn of the mountain morning. I joined them, and as I sat with the rest the Swami added one more to the little incense sticks set in the sand in front of each worshiper, and thirteen slender threads of perfumed, silvery smoke lost themselves in the blue of the early morning air. This, by the way, is the only approach to any ecclesiastical ritual or ceremony that I saw used among this people.

I closed my eyes with the rest, for the morning was one to be worshiped. For a time I was conscious of nothing but the liquid trill of a lark, the distant tinkle of cow bells, the busy tap of a woodpecker, the sharp bark of a coyote, the gentle soughing of the cool wind, the delicate, poignant aroma of the smoking incense and the melodious intoning of the Sanscrit scriptures. But, in a while, with the unusual physical quietude, perhaps the regular conscious breathing, the varied poetry of the scene and something else—atmosphere or what you will—I became conscious of an unusual harmony within myself, as if I were an instrument in absolute tune with some eternal harmony, a sense of unusual well-being and tranquility, which I have no words to express intelligibly. For how is the average American to understand the effect of an hour's conscious quiescence with the mind turned in upon itself in a rare introspection, and all amid such surroundings? It is open to experiment, however, and perhaps worth while.

After about an hour's silence, first one disciple, then another, left the circle and went about the daily round of common tasks. Until a few days ago all the water had to be fetched four miles in barrels, but a good spring has lately been discovered within a quarter of a mile from camp.

Some went to the well for water, and I was wondering if the teacher, by some divine right, were considered exempt from the common task. But with the rest he took the buckets and shared in all the labors of the camp. The women were

bustled about the breakfast and soon set before the company, under the waving awning of the al-fresco dining-room, a smoking bowl of mush, good bread and butter and stewed fruits. Needless to say that the camp is vegetarian. The meal passed in pleasant talk of friends: of Swami Vivekananda, founder of the movement in California, and now in Paris, with little intermissions into the realms of philosophy.

"A man may become so pure that his purity is tangible, as it were. The body may become pure in an intensely physical sense, and it must emanate that purity wherever it goes."

"If you practise Yoga your perceptions will become so fine that you will see these Tanmatras—the physical and mental atmosphere given off by every one as a flower throws out its scent.

"We are free and not free. Soul is free and body and mind are bound, whence comes the contradictory consciousness of coincident freedom and bondage. We must believe we are free; yet every moment finds we are not free. If you say that the idea of freedom is a delusion, I will also say that the idea of bondage is a delusion, because both stand upon the same basis—consciousness. So says the Raja Yoga," and the Swami, at the head of the table in a seat of honor made of manzanita boughs, calmly quoted saying after saying from his scriptures.

"What wonderful memories you people have, Swami," said some one.

"Not so much now," he said, "but in time past and with some even now, a book is read, and, with one reading, remains in the memory."

"May I photograph you here?" I asked, after the pleasant meal had ended, and with permission of the company I "took" the arbor under the oak trees, with hills on every side of it, where the Brahmin and his disciples eat their simple fare. Not

all eat together. Some few women have their little menage to themselves, and these are mostly women who have left all to follow the philosopher.

With evident relief the Swami rose after the operation, and, with his customary ejaculation, went after wood for the stove. After the dishes had been washed and tents had been set in order, the indefatigable philosophers again set about their eternal task.

This time the "service" began with reading from the "Raja Yoga," and a book of Sanscrit quotations from the Vedas, the Hindoo Scriptures, read first in the indescribably musical original and then translated. Then came the discussion of the subjects and the Swami, with his bronze brow drawn into fine lines and with expressive gestures and simple words, explained away the subtle difficulties in the path of the disciples. The theory of creation, morality versus spirituality, the place and limits of nature, evolution, were among the small problems that went round. John Fiske was quoted, and Huxley, who said that "the cosmic process has no relation to moral ends." Fiske's rejoinder, "I feel like replying with the question, 'Does not the cosmic process exist purely for the sake of moral ends?'" was remembered, and then the Swami called the meeting to order with a command to remember again the Atman (soul) and meditation began.

This time I had to think of returning, for my time among the seekers after the truth was almost gone, and I looked at them as one from the outside world must look. The gentle face of the teacher, calm, dark and strong against the blue sky; the face of women, old and young, at first restless, then calm as that of the Master himself; the faces of men, with the same rapt expression and utter obliviousness of surroundings, their eyes closed, or opened, unseeing. There they stayed another hour. Four hours a day they think and pray.

I watched and wondered a while.

"Aum, Aum, Aum," the strange chant rose and fell in its half-barbaric but wholly musical intervals, reminding one of the Egyptian hymn to Phtha, in "Aida."

"Aum, Aum, Aum," there is some magic in the word, for I must needs join in or leave the circle. But time waits for no man, or woman either, and I noiselessly go back to my log cabin.

"Aum, Aum, Aum," there in this Californian valley the hymns of the oldest religion known to man are being chanted—a religion so old that all traditions of its origin are lost in the mists of antiquity. Q

"Aum, Aum, Aum," what of the country where the chant is daily sung, with its millions dying of starvation and its multitudes living in direst poverty? Is there a connecting link between this religion, which teaches an absolute renunciation of all sense enjoyments, and the condition of the Hindoo masses? And is the mountain dreamer perhaps right that the millenium is coming, the child of the union of Eastern idealism and Western thought? Who knows? I take my leave of these kindly people with the weird chant still ringing in my ears, "Aum, Aum, Aum."

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## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD's forthcoming biography of Sri Ramakrishna, which has been serialized in *Vedanta and the West*, is entitled *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*. It will be published in book form by Simon and Schuster, Inc. in New York, by Methuen & Co. Ltd. in London, and by Advaita Ashrama in Calcutta. Previously unpublished photographs have been selected by the author for inclusion in the book.

E. RAPHAEL MAROZZI is a student of Indian philosophy and Sanskrit. In 1951 he organized a Vedanta study group in Honolulu which a guest swami (usually Swami Vividishananda of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Center, Seattle) conducts each year during the summer months.

BLANCH PARTINGTON's article on the "Shanti Ashrama," which begins on page 51 of the present issue, is reprinted in *Vedanta and the West*, courtesy of the San Francisco *Chronicle*. Those who would like to learn more about the life and teachings of SWAMI TURIYANANDA, who established the Ashrama, may be interested to know that an English biography of the Swami was published in 1963. Entitled *Swami Turiyananda*, it was written by Swami Ritajananda who heads the Vedanta center in France.

up the worse for wear. In due course, as my ego diminishes, I will come to see how poor my management is. It will become a habit with me to leave things to God.

But certain conditions prevail. First, there is the time element. His timing is often very different from what mine might be. He seems to work with more deliberation. I must recognize this and await events with patience.

Secondly, just because you aren't responsible doesn't mean you can be lazy. Indeed, you must be alert to his promptings, because sometimes it is you he uses as his appointed agent in coping with your affairs.

And third, if we leave things to the Lord we must accept the solutions he works out. He will not excuse us from all exertion, but he will, I am convinced, save us from serious strain. I once had a demonstration of this principle—or so I fancy. I had a long distance to go and no transportation. It was at night and I was tired. My course lay up two long hills and over two level stretches. I decided to leave in the hands of God the matter of whether I should get a lift to my destination or be forced to walk. What happened was that at the bottom of each of the two hills a motorist came along and offered me a ride. But the driver in each case was going only as far as the top. So I got rides up the steep places but had to walk on the flat parts!

It is hard to describe exactly how it operates—this policy of resigning one's fate to the Divine. It is a matter of living intuitively, in a state of "alert surrender." But the principle does work, for at moments now and then I have managed to abide by it. As I reflect upon these occasions I can see how well matters have gone when managed by him instead of me.

I have become a devotee of God. Why then should I not take advantage of what he is eager to do for me—to become my protector and the able director of the least of my affairs?

## Vedanta and the West

*Vedanta teaches that man's real nature is divine; that it is the aim of man's life to unfold and manifest this divinity; and that truth is universal. Vedanta accepts all the religions of the world and reveres the great prophets, teachers, and sons of God, because it recognizes the same divine inspiration in all.*

### STUDENT'S NOTEBOOK

No. 28

One day Shiva, looking down from heaven, noticed that a devotee of his was about to be set upon by a highwayman. So Shiva started forth to take up the man's defense. However, by this time the devotee had found a stick beside the road and was busily trading blows with the bandit. Eventually, although battered, the devotee was able to drive the robber away. In the meantime Shiva had relaxed, remarking, "Why should I interpose my aid when he prefers to help himself?"

This story illustrates a truth whose subtle implications I am learning to appreciate. If you think yourself capable of managing everything for yourself, the Lord will let you do it. (God is too well mannered ever to impose himself upon anyone.) Generally, however, since my knowledge is limited, my solutions will not be very good. I may, like the man in the story, get by; but I will have to fight my way through life and am bound to end

*Concluded on page 64*